

One day my wife told me that someone had stolen her Vespa. I told her not to make a complaint, and that perhaps I would have it returned to her; she was sceptical. I telephoned Conill. He made contact with the gang leader. The next day the Vespa was in front of my door. I examined it and the tank was full to the brim. I started it, and it ran perfectly.

In the evening two policemen knocked at my door and brought in a young man with handcuffs on his wrists;

"Here is the man who stole your Vespa," they told me triumphantly. I congratulated them for the speed with which they had arrested the thief, but I was quite surprised because we had not registered a complaint.

I telephoned Conill, who told me: "The thief was not part of the gang. He was detected quickly, forced to return the Vespa and then reported to the police."

It was by means of the pickpockets that we learned that the diplomatic pouch intended for the American economic mission contained much more explosive gelatin than mail. It was used for small acts of rather clumsy terrorism, almost always directed against the French. Thus, one day, several bicycles, their frames filled with explosive gelatin, had been placed at the curb of the hotel Continental; they were to explode at the time when a rather significant number of French officers were to meet to eat. Fortunately they arrived about an hour late, after the explosion, which caused only material damage. I was difficult to react. However, we knew that these actions were the act of an American from the economic mission; a little off his rocker, he thought this would make an impression on public opinion and show the unpopularity of the French, since they were bombed in the middle of Saigon. Conill had him watched, he disappeared suddenly and the assaults ceased. His body was discovered by the police, drowned under the Da Kao bridge.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See "Un Americain bien tranquille" (A very calm American) by Graham Greene.

### Epilogue at Orleansville

Sensing danger since the beginning of August, the underground fighters of the Cardamone zone assembled and set out in the direction of Laos. The Viets tried to stop them with all of their available forces. Between 20 and 25 August bloody battles were fought in the region of Son La and Na San. Finally the underground fighters succeeded in overthrowing the Viets and passing. About 3,500 of them, helped by the undergrounds in Laos, managed to break the blockade and reach the Louang Prabang region at the end of August; there, thanks to the support and help of the King of Laos, they were able to settle down. I believe that this region of Laos remained calm for so long and so strangely, largely because of the former underground fighters who had taken refuge there.

The underground fighters of the left bank of the Red River, the last to be installed but the best organized, the most dynamic and the most dangerous for the Viet Minh, were attacked as soon as operations ceased in the Delta. These assaults were conducted with an unprecedented violence by forces equivalent to a division. Essentially the terrain favored the underground fighters who had many commandos expertly trained in our Tonkin training centers.

Our radio communications continued to function. The officers of the Tonkin GMI were able to follow the vicissitudes of battles in progress. The first two Viet regiments which tried to oppose them were annihilated. The underground fighters were able to recover quantities of weapons. But at the end of the battle, when their enemies had used up their fire power, they desperately asked for ammunition, which, alas, we could not provide for them.

As far as I was able to learn when I left Indochina in December 1954, the battles in this region had not ceased.

In Laos our undergrounds had completely reoccupied and retaken control of the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua. But on the request of the SPECT this request was clandestine (a word which the Service liked to pronounce deep in the throat) and did not appear in any official report. Except for the small team which was involved with the undergrounds, everyone, including the French Army, was ignorant of it.

The Armistice Commission therefore did not know that a French officer and several noncommissioned officers were installed for nearly a year at Sam Neua, that they controlled the entire province with their underground fighters, and that the same situation held in Phong Saly.

Therefore it was completely inclined to accept the reoccupation of these provinces by the Viet Minh.

It was only by chance at the General Staff of the Plaine des Jarrés that Captain Sassi learned that the Viet were laying claim to Mong Et, a town important because of its geographic location at the border between Laos and Annam, and on the highway leading from Than Hoa to Louang Prabang. On his order Van Péc and his commando immediately went to Mong Et to show the Armistice Commission, by their presence, that this town was really under the control of the Laotians, and to prevent its being occupied by the Viet.

The same was true of the Sam Neua province. The Armistice Commission went there, believing in good faith, that it was under Viet control. Despite the presence of Lt. Brehier and his noncommissioned officers in the town, the Commission refused to acknowledge the French presence. Sassi had to go there in a helicopter, accompanied by the Laotian Captain Salanico, to affirm the presence of the French and Laotians at Sam Neua before the Commission. He had to stay there two weeks and take the members of the Commission into the various undergrounds to demonstrate the reality of our presence in this province.

The same case came up for the province of Phong Saly, which could only remain under Laotian control thanks to the obstinacy and cleverness of several GMI officers.

On 1 October 1954 I officially received command of the agency to end the GMI. According to the terms of the service record sent to me, I was to "assemble all of the files of the operational and technical command of the ex-GCIA-GMI, turn them over to the Captain responsible for assembling them, the Chief of Section 49, to study them and to draw lessons from them."

As for me, who had served for three years in the GCIA-GMI, first as the chief of the major Regional Representation, and then as Commander of all for 17 months, nothing was asked of me. I was rejected from the shop as an undesirable. The experience which my comrades and I had acquired did not interest anyone.

Right after my return to France during my period of leave, on 15 February 1955, I prepared a long report for the Ministry of the Armies. After summarizing the results obtained in various fields by the GMI, I concluded:

"The work accomplished by the GMI in Indochina deserves profound study. There is no reason why the same results cannot be obtained, for example, in other territories of the French Union, by applying and adapting the same methods elsewhere. Now, this study cannot be made except by officers perfectly aware of the evolution, the difficulties met and the functioning of the GCIA-GMI.

"Therefore I have the honor of requesting that this study be entrusted to me."

This report never received a reply.

However, I had the good fortune of knowing General Lecomte, at this time the Chief of the Special General Staff of General Koenig, the Minister of the Armies. I asked him to receive me so that I could explain the GMI problems to him. He received me on 9 June and composed a service record authorizing me to consult the

CCMA-GMI files deposited at the Office of Colonial Troops. He had asked me to compile a report concerning the organization, functioning, use of the GMI up to the Armistice, and to deduce lessons allowing an analogous service to be created in other Overseas Territories.

I drew up the report requested. But several weeks later the Minister was overturned. I never had an echo of this.

Although my relations with the SDECE Office had never been the best, I hoped that I would be summoned by its Director General, or at least by the Lieutenant-Colonel in charge of the Action Service as soon as I returned to France.

At the time when I was going to definitively leave the SDECE, I wrote the following letter to the Director General on 24 December 1954:

"Director General,

The GMI ceased all activity on 10 August. It will be dissolved on 30 September. At the time that I am going to leave the SDECE to return to my original branch with the majority of my comrades, I want to thank you for the confidence you have placed in me during the past year by giving my command of the GMI.

The report on the activity of the third quarter was finished yesterday. It presents information on the latest accomplishments. Given the means necessary for it, the GMI actually had unlimited possibilities. Since I no longer have to be involved in the material liquidation of the GMI as a troop corps, I have requested my tour to be shortened. I expect to be able to return at the end of the year and to be in France in the first days of January 1955.

Thanking you once again for the satisfaction which the command of the GMI has given me, please accept my respectful and devoted regards."

But here again I never had a reply.

On the way to Paris in 1955 I telephoned Colonel Morlane, telling him that I would be very happy to see him again. He received me amiably the next day, but we spoke of other things than the GMI. The Algerian War had begun. It was the object of all his attention. Algeria, so close to France.... It was France. There the Special Services would be able to exploit all of their talents with the personnel of their choice.

I asked him if it was possible for me to be received by the Director General. It took only a telephone call for my request to be satisfied.

The reception was very brief, scarcely ten minutes.

The Director General accused me of being a poor collaborator; it was impossible to work seriously with me. He wished me good luck in the Colonial Brigade of Paratroopers to which I had just been assigned. What the GMI had done in Indochina in four years was the distant past which did not seem to interest him.

It was the same thing in the Demibrigade of Paratroopers which I had been assigned to. The experience garnered by the GMI did not interest anyone. Most of the officers who had belonged to it had been assigned outside of the Brigade. Recalling my difficult relations with General Gilles, appointed inspector of the Airborne Troops on his return to France, I chose not to speak of it. On his first inspection at Bayonne, Gilles invited me to lunch with him. We spoke of everything except Indochina. The reasons which had made us opponents were quite forgotten, and despite our disputes the bonds of affection which had always connected us were unbroken. Six months later he took me into his General Staff at Paris. Other problems were waiting for us in Algeria....

Like many officers of my generation, I have sometimes regretted not having served in a communist army. Its leaders at all echelons try hard to extract lessons from battles, lost and won. In France, lost or won, they do not interest anyone.

The Indochina War had produced a strange phenomenon. Our generals refused to go there.<sup>1</sup> Our four or five star generals designated the youngest of them, with four stars, to command an army of 400,000 men, or at least 10 Army Corps and two or three armies. Then they waited for the imprudent victim to return to demolish him.

Although the War lasted nearly nine years, a considerable number of senior officers had never been there. Apparently this war was not worthy of their talents. Others made a rapid tour there, necessary for their career. For the great brains of the French Army, the Indochina War was a lower class war which did not provide any interest.

The War in Algeria had begun. At least in the beginning it resembled the Indochina War. Everything was going to begin again.

The material liquidation of the GMI lasted nearly two months. Covering the entire Indochina area, the operations of counting the materiel and armament, and verifying the accountability were necessarily protracted. It is true that I had at my disposal a senior captain, an old hand in Regimental Accounting, who perfectly performed his task.

There remained the liquidation of the special funds, for which I was especially responsible. Since the GMI had officially ceased all activity since the Armistice, I had the mission of collecting them and returning them to an authority who would be made known to me.

I was harassed to settle this last problem rapidly. But I wanted the most delicate part of my activity to be clear, and I did not want any question to be

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<sup>1</sup> General de Lattre was an exception. All of the generals who were successively Commander-in-Chief in Indochina had only four stars: Leclerc, Valluy, Blaizot, Carpentier, (de Lattre), Salan and Navarra.

posed on this subject after my departure. I had handled the special GOMA-GMI funds like those of a business. In order to face unexpected situations without difficulty, I had set up a large maneuvering sum; I used it while waiting for new funds to be granted to me.

When the funds were collected from the Regional Representations' treasuries and added to my maneuvering sum, I found myself with about 5.5 million piastres, or more than 50 million 1955-francs.

I was ordered to return them to General Noiret, the Director of General Ely's Staff. I did not know General Noiret very well. He wore a red beret and had been an inspector of Airborne Troops. I had met him in the latter guise once in Indochina, during a rapid inspection tour. Unless I am mistaken, he had never exercised command in Indochina.

At the end of December I went to his office with an enormous chest containing all of the accounting records and the remainder of the special funds. The designated authority had the option of verifying and checking my report. Certainly I knew that the special funds were not subject to the same control as the normal ones of a Troop Corps. However, I would have preferred a verification to be made, even an unofficial one, and that I be given a receipt. I wanted to leave Indochina with a tranquil mind. But the General told me that he did not have any authority to make the verification.

"I will take this chest to France," I said to General Noiret. "Thus the accounting can be easily put at the disposal of any authority able to check it."

The General looked at the 5.5 million piastres which I had put on his desk, surprised by the size of the sum.

"What are we going to do with it?" he asked astonished.

Then after a long moment of thought, he said: "We shall send it to the victims of Orleansville."



Like many mainland officers, General Noiret had made frequent trips to North Africa. Having come to Indochina with the Ely team, he was actually still in Algeria.

With my general staff I had elaborated a succinct plan for using the GCMA-gun funds. To a certain extent it consisted of indemnifying the men, and their families, who had been devoted to France and who faced an uncertain fate. But this plan could only be achieved with the approval and under the control of Command. It had never occurred to me that Indochina funds, the use of which appeared obvious, would be sent to Algeria!

It was original, to say the least, to such a degree that I felt unable of to make the least suggestion to the General.

Then he spoke to me at length about the parachutists.

"Now," he said to me, "You will come back to the Army. You have assuredly performed a heap of interesting things, but which refer neither to a traditional army nor even more to the parachutists. A parachute unit has a value, and its value, potential and performance are always known. Paratroopers are valuable units which should never be engaged lightly, but in a precise sector of the battle field at a time judiciously chosen to use their outstanding qualities to the best purpose. For several years you have scattered yourselves. This is what you yourself should become again: the value of gold.

Listening to General Noiret I thought of what the Commanding Colonel of the TAPI had said to me five years earlier on my return to France, after I had commanded the 2nd BCCP for two years. Their ideas with respect to the use of paratroopers were not so different.

"General," I finished by telling him, "We have been deeply involved, my comrades and I, in the mission which had been given to the GCMA-GIT. We believe we

could have done more if we had begun several years earlier, and that the fate of Indochina may have been changed!

"Finally," I concluded, "We are going to try to convert ourselves into a value of gold...."

It was over. Having extended my normal tour by a year, I could have remained in Indochina for six more months. But for what? In this country where I had spent so many years, where I had known so many comrades, I suddenly felt alone. Most of them had returned or were about to leave. They were replaced by unknown people who discerned Indochina with completely new eyes. We called them the "ALCF" (After the Cease-Fire). The fate of Indochina was in their hands. There was nothing left for us to do but to wish them good luck....

....And good luck also to this country which we loved, which had excited us, and where so many of our men had died, in the end for nothing.

## Final Words

In February 1964, when war had broken out again in Indochina after several years of peace, I received a letter in Paris with the heading of the Institute for Defense Analyses from Washington. It came from Mr. Stephen Enke, Assistant to the President. He wanted to meet me in Paris.

As I have written in this book, I was not an unknown to the American Special Services. In addition my book, "La Guerre moderne" (Modern Warfare) had been translated into English and had interested the American officers faced with a new type of warfare. I had exchanged considerable correspondence on this subject with some officer-professors in the School for Special Warfare of the United States Army, i.e., The U.S. Army Special Warfare School.

In March 1964 I therefore met the Assistant to the President in Paris. The role played by our undergrounds in Indochina had attracted the attention of the Americans. They wanted me to take it over again, under a form to be determined. Now, I was free and had voluntarily left the French Army three years before. But, despite the temptation to return to this country which I loved, it was impossible for me to accept.

When we had created the Indochina undergrounds, we had been absolutely sincere with our underground fighters. We were certain that France, our France, would never abandon them, that we would fight with them and for them against communism and for their freedom. The bonds of friendship which connected us seems indissoluble.

Now, the total confidence they had placed in us had been betrayed by us, since we had abandoned them without even trying to defend them.

It was impossible to present ourselves in front of them without suffering a deep feeling of blame and, why not use the word, shame. We would never have been able to have the emphasis of sincerity which we had at that time, necessary to

instigate and convince. We were not movie stars, capable of playing any role at all.

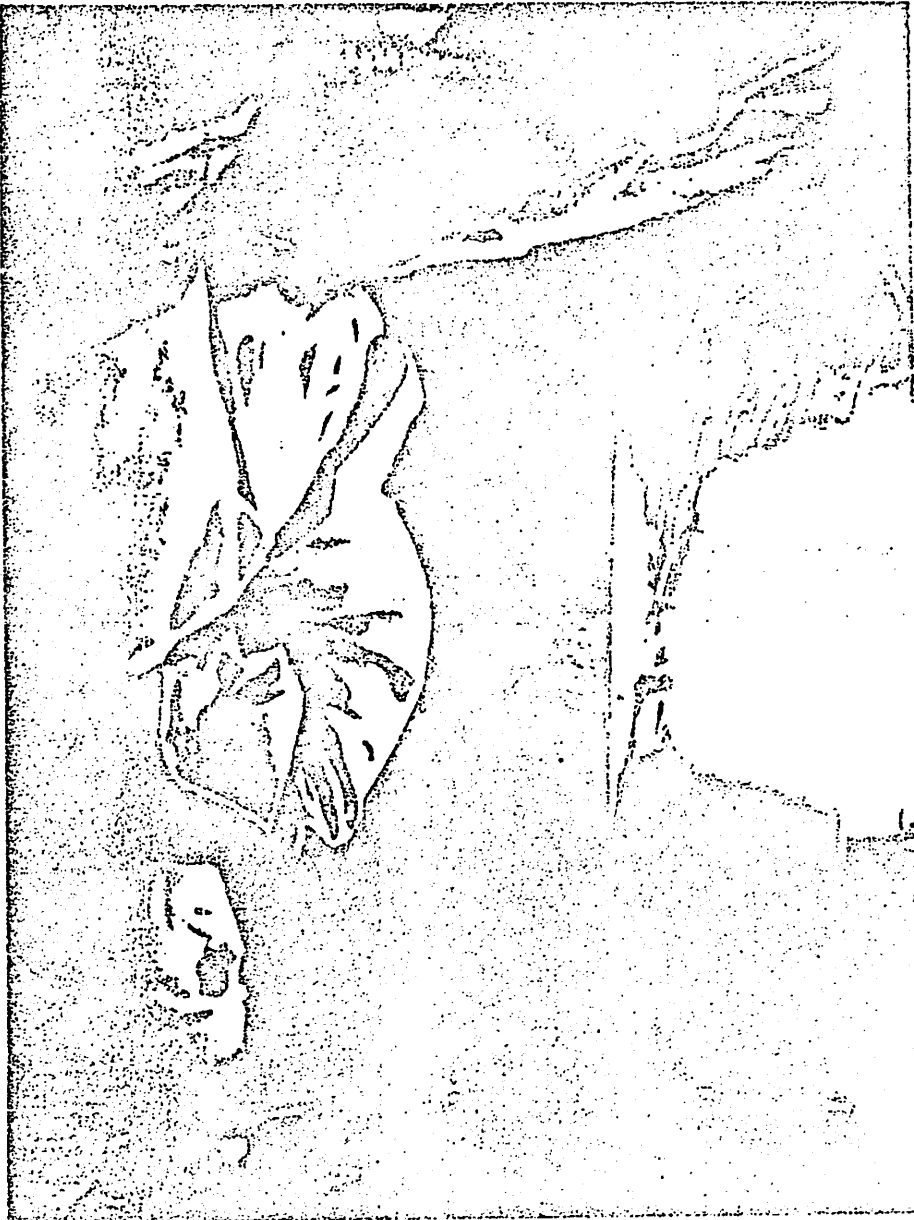
However, I am certain that our former underground fighters, or at least those remaining, would have taken up the struggle again at the request of our comrades.

But I was certain that, no matter how the war turned out, they would be abandoned again.

Therefore I never returned to Indochina.

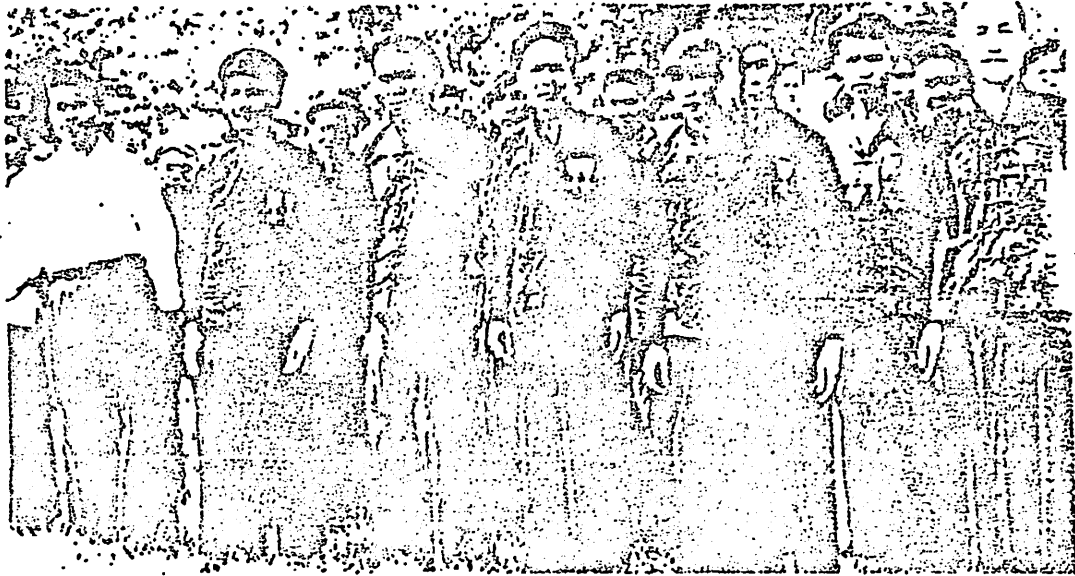
R. Tringuer Collection.

Lieutenant-Colonel Tringuer, Commander of the Composite Airborne Commando Group.



Parachuting to an underground

2 Photographic Documents



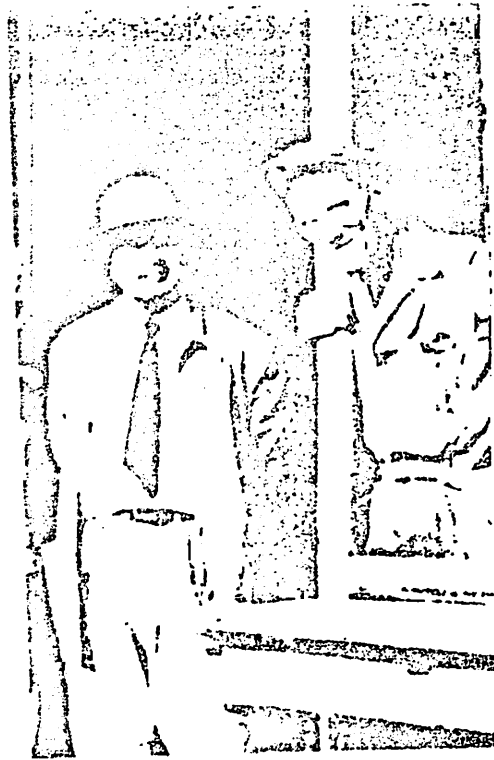
Thai underground fighters after receiving decorations. R. Trinquier Collection.

Young Men underground fighter participating in the war. R. Tringuler Collection.



That Country. The young girl is an underground nurse. R. Tringuler Collection.





Touby Lyfoung, the king of the Meos with Captain Sassi. R. Trinquier Collection.



No caption. R. Trinquier Collection.



Group of underground fighters at Thuan Chau in October 1953. R. Tringher Collection.



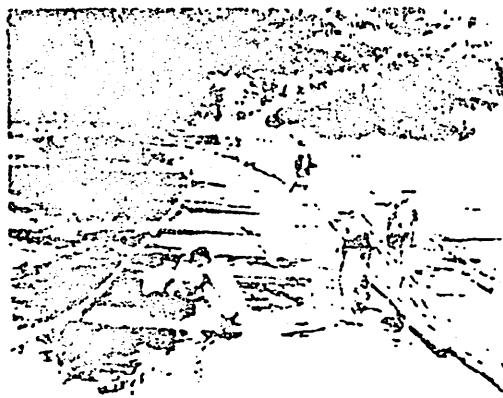
The Colibri underground, installed in May 1953 in the Longhe plateau, re-grouped two persons to harness the Viet Minh columns.



Captain Habert on his mission to Muong Lam. R. Trinquier Collection.



Cotonh in July 1953. R. Trinquier Collection.



Construction of a footbridge on the Song Ma. R. Trinquier Collection.

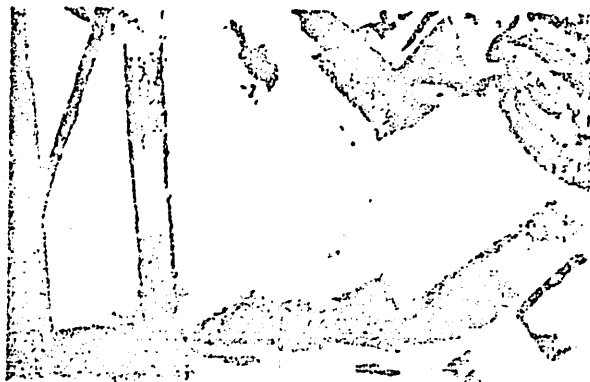
Underground fighters patrolling in Thai country.



Huong Lam: radio communication.



Parachute drop to an underground.





Laos, October 1953. Landing of a Beaver at the Thum Chau underground.

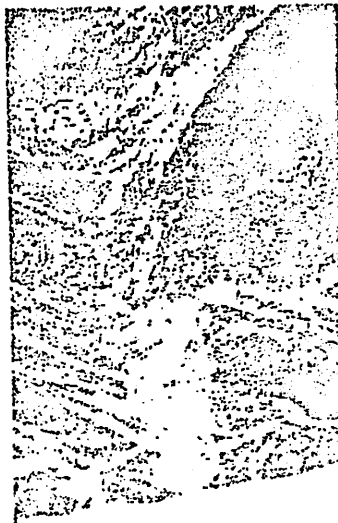


GCMA underground fighters "presenting" arms.

Tringuer inspecting the Phong Saly underground.



Aerial view of an underground emplacement.



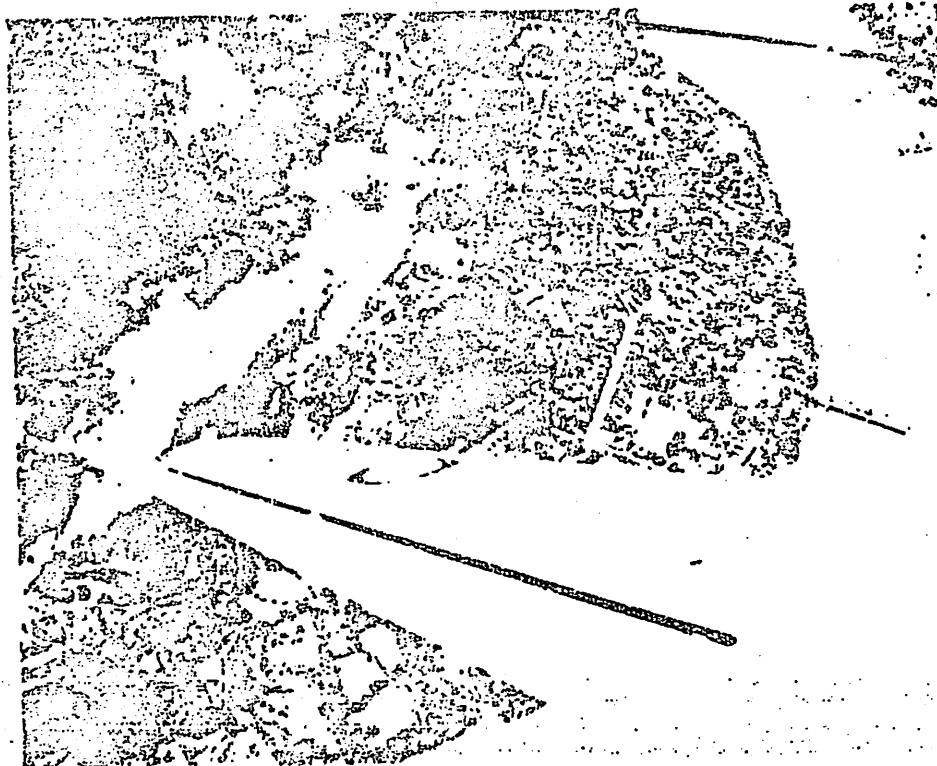
Aiglon underground. Sergeant Maljean.



Departure of underground fighters for Dien Bien Phu.

Laos Kay, 5 October 1953. An underground commando is parachuted to destroy the  
Coc Lou Viet Minh weapon, ammunition and food depots.





The highway bridge 300 meters long is destroyed, blocking the food convoys coming from China.



### 3 The Files

#### 1 The Implantation, 1952

Internal organization of an underground.

1 officer, in charge of underground operations;

1 Noncommissioned officer, logistics support, Special Mission instructions.

The military advisors at the province, district, canton and village echelons are responsible for:

- a) developing the self-defense system,
- b) training recruits, and
- c) developing commandos.

Key for chart on following page: 1-underground chief; European advisors on temporary mission, 2-central office; one native officer, corresponding to the underground chief, responsible for relations with military authorities, 3-aide, psychological activity, economic services, 4-political and administrative aid, military advisor (1), 5-military aide (sanitation of the guerrilla zones), 6-propaganda teams, 7-cooperation (missing word(s)), 8-provincial chief, military advisor, 9-parachute support commandos, 10-commandos within underground, 11-special contact missions, 12-hospital, social actions, 13-district chief, military advisor, 14-canton chief, military advisor, 15-village chief, military advisor.

